# STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA


# How We Found a Safe Haven at the Albany Bulb

**The Homeless Task Force worked to solve homelessness by using the "Housing First" model. But the Albany City Council has chosen the "eviction first" approach.**

by Amber Whitson

Until my partner Phyl and I came to live on the Albany Bulb, every attempt I had ever made at having a home, after graduating high school and moving out on my own, had failed, miserably.

When we came to the Albany Bulb, we were seeking refuge from constant police harassment — the same mistreatment that any average homeless person is subjected to — while living on the streets.

What we found was far more than a refuge. We found a Home.

### History of the Landfill

First, let us review the background and history of this land. The landfill was created on the Albany shoreline in 1963 when the City of Albany signed a contract with the Sante Fe Railroad Company "for the purpose of creating usable land."

Until 1975, the operators of the Albany Landfill accepted all types of garbage, even household waste. But the landfill was intended for "demolition debris" and, over time, the earlier garbage was buried under tons of concrete rubble, rebar, wire mesh, corrugated tin, steel, asphalt, glass, plastic and excavated dirt, as well as iron, coke and slag from the local steel mills.

I have friends who remember watching the landfill as it was being created, and they have told me that the remnants of everything that was "in the way" when the East Bay stretch of BART was built (supposedly including the original Richmond City Hall and Berkeley Public Library) is now buried under years' worth of detritus, right here in the Albany Landfill.

For at least 20 years, from 1963 to 1983, a multitude of environmental groups, including Save the Bay and Citizens for East Shore Parks (CESP), sued the City of Albany and the landfill operators until the operation was finally shut down, in December of 1983.

In 1985, Albany signed a lease agreement with the California Department of Parks and Recreation, thereby giving the entire landfill property to the State of California for free, with the ultimate goal of turning this "usable land" into part of the State Parks system.

However, in order for the transfer of ownership and management to take place, the City of Albany was supposed to mitigate the hazards that the state saw in a surface covered with large concrete chunks and rebar. As another condition of the agreement, Albany was supposed to manage the closed landfill site according to the rules and regulations of the State Parks system (which would have required a strict prohibition on unpermitted camping).

Two "friends" sculpted by Osha Neumann sit on a bench enjoying the sunshine on the Albany shore. This artwork symbolically reveals the way in which a community slowly grew on the Bulb, as friends became neighbors. Root Barrett photo

However, once the landfill was shut down in 1983, nobody ever actually did anything with the land, not even those who had fought so hard to preserve it.

Nobody, that is, until artists, anarchists and previously homeless individuals, who made homes for themselves on the Albany Bulb, gradually beautified and improved the "uncapped" surface, which was, and still is, dotted with chunks of concrete and rebar.

### The Community at the Bulb

Next, let us consider the recent history that resulted in people inhabiting the Albany Bulb. In 1993, Albany police started telling homeless Albany residents to "go live on the landfill."

The people who moved out here became a community, as neighbors do, building homes for themselves and living lives more "normal" than many of them had previously thought possible.

Then, in 1999, the City of Albany decided to evict the entire Albany Bulb community. City officials set up two temporary trailers that were run by Operation Dignity, a nonprofit that prefers to help only homeless veterans. At the same time, the City drafted — and had the police begin to enforce — Albany Municipal Code 8-4.4, the "no camping ordinance" that criminalized and banished the previously homeless individuals who had made homes here on the Bulb.

I know many people who were evicted from the Albany Bulb in 1999. Virtually all of them are still residually traumatized. And, of those who are still alive, all but two or three remain homeless to this day.

Within months, the City of Albany instructed the police to cease enforcement of the "no camping" ordinance on the Albany Bulb. So, people came back. And made homes.

Many homeless people report that their love of the natural beauty on the Albany shoreline has been a deeply healing force in their lives. Amber Whitson photo

**A hermit is "a person who has withdrawn to a solitary place for a life of religious seclusion." I would absolutely say that we have benefited spiritually, as well as mentally and physically, from our secluded, nature-loving way of living.**

### Secluded Life at the Hermitage

Now, to bring it all back home, I'll describe how living on the Albany Bulb has affected me and my family. My partner and I moved out here on October 31, 2006. We had been together, living in Berkeley, for about a year and were tired of being harassed by police just because we were homeless. When we moved to the Albany Bulb, a new life began for both of us.

I cannot say that Phyl and I had "religious" reasons in mind when we first moved to the Bulb. However, I would assert that asking us to change our lifestyle (which has been termed "Urban Survivalist") from that which we have lived for more than seven years now, to the very lifestyle that we have grown to view as the polar opposite of our own, is very much like asking someone to change

*See* **How We Found a Safe Haven** *page 6*

# St. Mary's Honors the Lives Lost on the Streets

**Reflections from the Homeless Memorial held at St. Mary's Center on Dec. 10, 2013, to honor those who died on the streets of the East Bay.**

Charles Ford photographed a homeless man sleeping on the sidewalk in Oakland.

## The Sanctity and Dignity of Human Life

**by Carol Johnson**

Thank you for joining us in this circle of remembrance and prayer. Sixty-five years ago today, the nations of the world came together as the United Nations and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is fitting that our memorial for homeless people who have died coincides with the anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights — and the memorial of Nelson Mandela, because as the former president of South Africa, he revered the Declaration of Human Rights as a touchstone for nation-building and governing.

It is vital to remember Mandela's wise words with regards to human rights and the role that governments and all of us together have in assuring these rights. Mandela considered poverty one of the greatest evils in the world and spoke out against inequality everywhere.

So we are here today to remember the lives of people who died homeless and poor and to reclaim our profound awareness of the sanctity and dignity of every human life. Yes, we are here together to change the world — to make it a little easier for people to feed, clothe and shelter themselves — to cry out for justice and for the broad interpretation and full implementation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Dorothy Day reminds us: We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. We can open our hearts. Quite simply there is nothing we can do but love, and dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as our friend.

## Let Us Remember Those with No Homes

**by Ellen Danchik**

As another winter approaches, it is impossible to find out how many people have died in Alameda County while homeless. No county or state agency bothers to care or even take notice of who is dying on their streets.

As a result of this governmental neglect, homeless people die unnoticed and unnamed. Even as we gather to mourn this loss of life, we do not know the names of so many who have died.

*In 1990, I was working with the* Oakland Union of the Homeless and Terry Messman was able to get permission for me to go to the Alameda County Coroner's office. There, for two weeks, I researched the deaths of homeless people in the county. I had to go through hundreds of records of "transient deaths," because no list was kept by county officials.

The Homeless Union then organized a demonstration where hundreds marched to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors to report on how many people had died on the streets of the East Bay, and to demand that housing be built for the county's homeless citizens.

Yet, to this day, there is still no list offered to the public by any governmental agency of those who have died on city streets. It is kept hidden from public view. It is a dirty little secret.

There are fewer shelter beds this year in Alameda County. The winter shelter housed at the former Oakland Army Base, with combined funding from several sources, which housed about 100 people last winter, lost its funding this year.

We are here to mourn the loss of those who have died needlessly on the street, and we are here to dedicate ourselves to fighting for permanent housing.

The city, county, state and country are all in violation of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25, which declares that all people have the right to housing, food, healthcare and an adequate income.

Government officials must be made to comply, to uphold human rights and meet the needs for housing and healthcare. We can start right here at St. Mary's Center by joining the Hope and Justice Committee to fight for the right to housing.

I wrote a reflection called "Lost and Found" about all the lives that are tragically lost on the streets of our city.

**LOST AND FOUND**

We come together during the holidays,
a season when we enjoy the warmth and
togetherness of our families.
The familiar Christmas carol says it all:
*"There's no place like home*
*for the holidays."*
But for homeless people, there really is
no place to call home for the holidays,
or any other days.
Instead of home, so many people are lost,
Lost on the streets of our own cities,
Lost in the midst of the holiday season.
Lost.... No family is looking for them.
No warm home awaits their return.
No one is looking to see if they made it
home safely. If you have no home,
should that make you invisible?
In every faith tradition, we are taught
To have compassion for the poor.
The poor are especially blessed by God,
God loves them with a merciful love,
a love they often do not find on this earth.
Let us remember those without a home.
Let us all work together for justice and
homes for all, so the Lost may be Found.

## Overcoming Poverty Is an Act of Justice

**by Susan Werner**

Nelson Mandela considered ending poverty a basic human duty: He said, "Overcoming poverty is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

Elders in our community are fulfilling this basic human duty. They are trailblazing the path of upholding the right to dignity and a decent life, especially for our brothers and sisters who are homeless.

In the summer of 2013, eight seniors volunteered to participate in a photo documentary project about homelessness that was initiated by a local artist in our community, Taryn Evans. Taryn wanted to care for and bring to light the plight of homeless people and to inspire solutions to end homelessness.

Two of the seniors who participated in the documentary project are Charles Ford and Darrell Black. Out of their direct experience of being homeless, Charles and Darrell have become motivated, articulate, impassioned, and emboldened as crusaders of conscience and justice.

In conveying experiences of hardship and heartbreak, they do not dwell on the adversities they have experienced. They find meaning and purpose in their lives. They focus on what they understand and can offer from their own experiences.

These gentlemen have related to circumstances of their lives as an opportunity to cultivate compassion, to deepen their commitment to uphold basic human dignity, and to offer direction to us all who are united for justice.

We thank these elders for shining their light and fueling our collective flame and responsibility to serve human rights and to end homelessness within our communities, cities, nation and world.

## "I Know How Desperate It Feels"

**by Charles Ford**

I was homeless for about a year. I know how desperate it feels to not have a shelter bed. I never felt I could survive out on the streets. The cold weather magnifies the critical need for shelters. I hope that people of conscience will see homeless people as people.

When I took photos of people who are homeless, I was astounded to see so many homeless people all around this area, even someone sleeping outside the gate of St. Mary's Center.

I feel for people who are going through homelessness. There are a lot of ways people stay homeless and are constrained by poverty. Many suffer a mental poverty and are not capable of accessing services and putting their lives together.

Many steps and services are needed for a person to come out of poverty, to obtain housing, to have sufficient food. There is a lot to understand about people who are homeless, like what makes it difficult to accept support, and what makes it possible to receive support.

At St. Mary's Center, I found the Shelter Program offered something better than I had experienced in other shelters. The atmosphere and people around me felt better; even sleeping on cots felt OK. I began to feel better about myself. I have a more positive outlook and am building a more fulfilling and productive life.

Now when I see people who are homeless and not well off, I open to their suffering, and feel connected to them. As I speak for people who cannot speak for themselves, I truly hope to be of help. Homeless people need connections to others who care and offer more possibilities for their lives.

## "Don't Give Up — Life Is Not Over"

**by Darrell Black**

I stayed in St. Mary's shelter this past spring. St. Mary's Center helped me through a rough time. I had not received payment for my work and lost my apartment. I feared I would have to sleep on the streets. I was a wreck.

So many people are at risk of becoming homeless, even people who are employed. I now feel connected to people who are homeless. All are worthy of being seen with respect and offered help. I am aware that perhaps half of the work force may be two weeks from homelessness.

I took photos for the documenting homeless project. I saw this woman who lives under the freeway. I felt for her.

I could have been out there like her. I spoke with her. She was so happy to have her photo taken. She didn't know anyone cared. She had accepted her situation and adapted. She made the best of what she had and had not given up. Her positive attitude appeared on a sign on her cart.

People who are homeless are not giving up. They can survive sleeping outside. However, poverty and depression are stressful, and stress can kill. I learned as I went through being homeless that no matter what happens, I am a warrior and a survivor. Most people do adapt to their situation and survive.

I've learned about Compassion. When I was homeless, I was going through rough, raw stuff. People said things to me that felt hurtful. I learned that no matter what a person is going through, it's most important not to look down on anyone.

It matters to offer encouragement, to tell a person: "Don't give up. Life is not over. You can make life better."

I learned not to wear my feelings on my sleeve and to continually focus on changing my life. I'm wiser now, and am taking better care of myself and my health.

I am now employed as a manager of a restaurant and a construction business. I've appreciated the help of St. Mary's Center and Second Opportunity Christian Center.

People who are homeless need help. There are many services in our community that assist with housing, food, health care and employment. These programs motivate people to make real changes in their lives. Times are rough, and these services need more funding, not cuts.

In closing, I give thanks to God. God brought me through, and will help all who trust and believe.

# Nelson Mandela Never Lost Focus on Building a Better World for All

**"As poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest... Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom."** — Nelson Mandela

**A man holds the official program at the memorial service for Nelson Mandela, held at the FNB Stadium in the Johannesburg, South Africa township of Soweto, on Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2013.** AP Photo by: Peter Dejong

*Hamba Kahle Nelson Mandela*

**by Jim Cason**

When a friend of mine asked Nelson Mandela's family how he would want to be remembered, the response was as a loyal member of the African National Congress and as a part of the broader movement.

Speaking at the 90th birthday for Walter Sisulu, one of his fellow inmates on Roben Island, Mandela declared, "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead." Mandela made that difference in South Africa and around the world.

### THE DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN

I only met Mandela twice in his lifetime, but his struggles, his actions and his words have inspired me for decades. I encourage you to read about the Defiance Campaign and the decades of struggle by the ANC and others before the 1960s to change their country through nonviolence. One group I was privileged to work with in the 1980s, the American Committee on Africa, was founded by civil rights activists (including the Quaker Bill Sutherland) who were inspired by the Defiance Campaign.

Tonight, I went back and read Mandela's court statement during his treason trial in 1964 in which he recounts why the ANC felt it had to take up the armed struggle. For a picture of the man from this period, I also recommend the video of his first television interview which shows both Mandela's brilliance and the ignorance of 1960s television journalists.

Mandela's eloquence was lost on our own government. The United States continued to identify its economic and political interests as tied to the white minority government in South Africa — as was so eloquently expressed in the secret 1968 NSSM 39 to then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that concluded "the whites are here to stay."

But inside South Africa, despite brutal repression, the ANC, the PAC, the Black Consciousness Movement, the expanding trade union movement and the broad United Democratic Front were building a movement to force change. A small group of progressive churches, working through the South African Council of Churches, also played an important role.

In our country, I was part of a generation inspired to act by the Soweto uprisings in the 1970s that built on the work of earlier generations. While the U.S. government was branding Mandela's ANC as a "terrorist" organization and supporting South African-backed contra groups in southern Africa, the grassroots movement in this country was working to pressure not only the U.S. government but also the U.S. corporations that were benefiting from the apartheid regime.

I learned from Ben Magubane and from my friend Jennifer Davis that apartheid was also an economic system that allowed the super exploitation of the black majority for the profit of a small minority in South Africa and big corporations from Europe and the United States. Ultimately, it was the people around the United States working together through the churches, the unions and the divestment movement that forced Congress to override President Ronald Reagan's veto and impose sanctions on South Africa.

The people of South Africa did the hard work to achieve their own freedom and that struggle has inspired me and millions of others around the world. What I also learned during that period is how much our own U.S. corporations benefited from the economic system called apartheid. When the corporations concluded they could no longer benefit from apartheid, they began to push the government for changes in the hope that they could shape future economic policies.

### MANDELA'S FIRST TRIP TO THE U.S.

I was in London at a worldwide meeting of the "free Mandela Movement" on the weekend he was released from prison. We knew immediately that he would come to the United States and that his trip could be a great boost for the effort to achieve one person, one vote in South Africa.

We also suspected there would be many politicians and others who would seek to co-opt the Mandela image for their own purposes and try to go slow on the transition to a democratic South Africa. The same corporations and governments that had supported the apartheid state would now begin to embrace the man they had helped to imprison and delay the goal of a free, non-racial South Africa. (Although their embrace only went so far — Mandela himself was on the U.S. terrorism watch list until 2008).

I think it was Little Steven Van Zandt, who with Danny Schechter put together the Sun City Project, who suggested the slogan for Mandela's first trip to the U.S. should be: "Keep the Pressure on South Africa." And so it was.

We helped organize events at Yankees Stadium, at Robert De Niro's club (where Mandela focused on the former boxer Joe Frazier and not on Madonna and the other stars) and many other locations. Mandela understood the importance of meeting with local activists who had organized the divestment movement across the country.

He agreed to speak at an event for only 100 people (two from each state) organized for selected anti-apartheid movement activists from around the country who were the grassroots part of the movement. Mandela understood that these movement stalwarts were a key to the work that had gone on and needed to keep going on for South Africa to achieve one person, one vote in a unified state.

He returned to South Africa and, in 1994, became the first democratically elected president of that country. So much of the public narrative about Nelson Mandela focuses on his suffering in the years in prison, the brutal treatment he received and his preaching of reconciliation.

### THE WORLD WE SEEK

What inspires me is the continuing focus throughout his life on making a better world and his understanding that the movement for change was always going to be bigger than any one person.

For example, Mandela didn't pretend that his own government had achieved what it set out to do. In his retirement speech, he talked about how, in his own country, "millions still bear the burden of poverty and insecurity." Mandela wasn't scared to talk about how the levels of poverty and racial inequality in South Africa today haven't changed that much from when Mandela took office.

And his focus was not just on South Africa. When a U.S. president decided our country must invade Iraq because of the threat of weapons of mass destruction, Mandela was among those who recalled that the United States is the only country in the world to ever use weapons of mass destruction on a large scale. And asked to explain why President George Bush would invade Iraq, Mandela responded, "All he wants is Iraqi oil."

**What inspires me about Nelson Mandela is the continuing focus throughout his life on making a better world and his understanding that the movement for change was always going to be bigger than any one person.**

Mandela never lost his focus on the better world he wanted to make. In 2005, speaking in Johannesburg, he said, "as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest... Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. *While poverty persists, there is no true freedom."*

As our friends in Mozambique used to say, "La Luta Continua."

Jim Cason is a staff member of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL).


## Street Spirit

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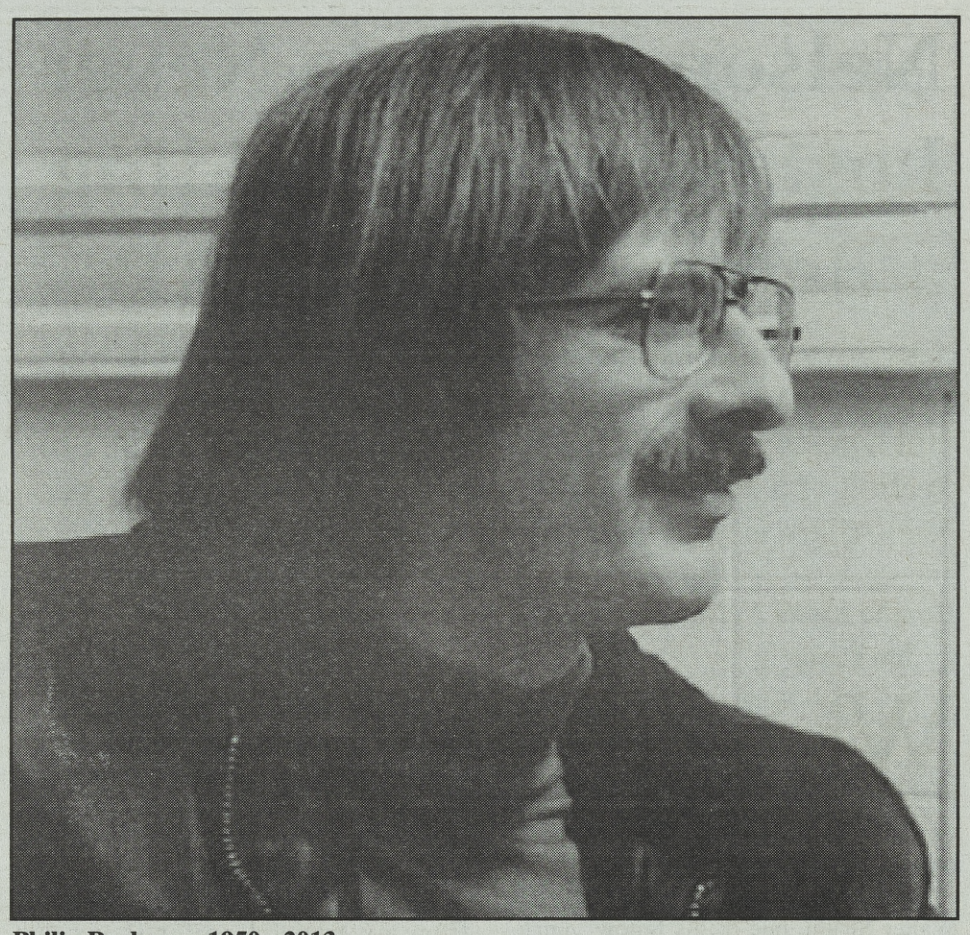
# 'Follow Your Passion'

## *Philip Rosheger's Lifelong Love of Music*

**The man who would have given anyone the shirt off his back left very little behind him except that same starry look in the faces of those who knew him, heard him, and loved him.**



**Philip Rosheger, 1950 - 2013.**

**by Carol Denney**

Classical guitarist Philip Rosheger died on December 4, 2013, of complications following heart surgery. His family and friends know how deep a loss this represents musically and personally, and a larger community of those who knew him only through his music will share in their bereavement. But everyone might benefit from knowing more about his life and the circumstances through which he made music out of even the most humbling moments.

Born in 1950 in Oklahoma, Philip Rosheger's musical study began with piano lessons, then quickly moved on to master guitar lessons with Andres Segovia on full scholarship from the Spanish government. He was the first American to win first prize in the International Guitar Competition, an honor he won in 1972 when he was only 22.

He was on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music from 1975 to 1978 and worked at Sonoma State University from 1979 to 1989, in addition to performing and giving master classes.

Philip also played locally in restaurants, pizza parlors, nursing homes and on the street. He used to laugh that he possibly shipwrecked his reputation by doing so. The world of classical music was peculiar, he would explain to those who would listen. It had a snobbery that made him bristle.

He told me once about how booking a national tour the usual way forced him to criss-cross the nation back and forth repeatedly through various time zones and rush from airport to concert hall and back. Minimizing "downtime" maximizes money, the agent's logic went. Cramming as many gigs as possible into a short space of time saved on hotel costs, and spreading the gigs wildly from one end of the country to the other minimized taxing the same draw.

This is musician-speak, and I'd heard it as a young child from the jazz musicians my parents knew from the Los Angeles area in the 1950s and 1960s. One hitch in the weather, one difficulty at one airport, one flat tire could jeopardize an entire tour stacked back-to-back with barely enough time to travel between them. It was a harrowing life, especially without family or the comforts of home.

It was so soulless and exhausting for Philip that he insisted that his next tour be booked with logic other than financial so that he could adjust his body, meet the people in a region, take a look at the countryside, and enjoy the journey. For Philip, every moment offered an opportunity to make a real connection.

If you were willing to wait respectfully until the end of a composition, Philip would tell you its composer and its history. If the composition were his own and he had his folios nearby, he would show you some of the decisions he'd made musically along the way and talk composition.

One of my favorite moments was in what we called Ho Chi Minh Park in Berkeley, trading tunes and goofing around with his friend and well-known classical guitarist Michael Lorimer. I remember thinking how wondrous it was, the town of Berkeley, where two such esteemed musicians could be heard by just wandering through a public park.

Philip loved being able to evoke a sense of wonder in people who might have little musical background and zero interest in what can be a cut-throat classical competition. The sheer love of music transported him entirely and he could always tell when people had taken the journey with him.

One of his students, Dan Winheld, wrote this about the experience of taking a lesson with Philip: "It was by far the best single guitar music lesson I have ever had, if not one of the best private music lessons ever — and I have studied with masters from Alirio Diaz to Hopkinson Smith, and enough others in between. Phil spent over three hours or more teaching me about tango, its history, Piazzolla, Leo Brouwer, tone production, and more while seated on the floor in half-lotus position — all the while demonstrating with incomparable ease and mastery on his guitar, playing with an authority, expertise, and more tone color than I have heard any classical guitarist pull from the instrument."

But Berkeley changed. Philip fought an eviction from his apartment for a long time, knowing that the loss of his rent-controlled apartment would exacerbate an already precarious financial situation. He had no buffer against the rapacious rent hikes going on around him except a wealth of friends' generosity.

At one point, he decided that he would leave the United States, with its obsession with consumerism and seeming disdain for the arts and artists, and return to the Europe of his youth, where his talent and facility for language and music found easy welcome. But Europe had changed, too.

The new, terrorism-obsessed world now had policies restricting foreigners' ability to work, requiring citizenship papers, forbidding busking, etc. He traveled from country to country trying to find the harbor that had once existed for artists, and finally gave up, accepting a plane ticket home from friends.

Philip was right about Europe in the 1960s, according to the conversations I remember of touring jazz musicians, such as Herb Geller, who finally gave up touring the states. The difficulties for artists in the states compared to the reception elsewhere in the world was often a topic of conversation at my house, and my parents could only apologize for the overt racism of Los Angeles police and the general disrespect toward artists.

But Philip hadn't banked on a post-911 world where the American disdain for art as frivolous and expendable would infect European culture as well, as he saw it. His more recent years after his return from Europe were difficult, but he continued playing and attempting to reconstruct folios of original compositions he'd lost during his travels, until a stroke in 2013 severely affected his playing.

Philip and I spent long hours on the phone lamenting the unwillingness of local musicians to organize on their own behalf. When the Solano Merchant Association decided to save money by discontinuing payments to Solano Stroll musicians, Philip Rosheger was one of the few musicians who immediately understood and supported refusing to play, a stand one takes at the risk of being blackballed. He scolded musicians who played for free, thus allowing often wealthy business owners to short-change musicians and artists and running working-class artists entirely out of the game.

His difficulties here were in sharp contrast to a trip to Mexico only a few years ago for a series of performances, where his enthusiastic welcome was overwhelming.

As his sister Carla put it, "Philip and I talked by phone at length on how he felt about the incredible reception he received in Mexico in stark comparison to the USA. He was truly amazed, humbled and honored by the fact that the Mexican musicians continuously called him Maestro. I told him, 'That's because you are a Maestro, Philip.' I know this journey gave Philip renewed passion for continuing his music the way he thought he should here, no matter the sometimes negative fallout."

But both of us knew that what may seem like end-times for musicians are not musicians' fault. In the 1940s in San Francisco, for instance, any local bar worth its salt had a piano, a piano player, the best musicians they could find to play best-loved tunes and competed for business with their music against the bar band down the block — a perfect recipe for keeping good musicians working at least consistently, if not well paid.

Then came canned music — the jukebox at first, then later the attitude that somehow playing music live in public was either rude or wrong. The generation that grew up hearing music come out of boxes instead of played live often has no objection to brutally repetitive synthesized beats and little awareness of technology's cold effect on working musicians already ill-treated by a commercially driven music industry now on the rocks.

Philip was completely captivated by the marriage of tones and the collision of rhythms. We talked for hours about music and politics and the changes we'd seen over our decades of playing. We watched as dozens and dozens of our friends put down their instruments, hammered by irate roommates, time and family constraints, or physical ailments. But we kept playing.

One of Philip's joys in the last few years was finally finding a place to live in an apartment in Oakland where a musician, a horn player, lived in a nearby unit. Philip told me he knocked on the man's door, and when the man opened the door the man immediately began to apologize for playing. Philip laughed and said, no, no, he had only knocked on his door to thank him for the music and tell him how much he loved hearing him play.

Philip's family had a small private memorial after his passing, but is planning a public memorial concert this spring in celebration of his life and music. A fundraising effort has been set up on a website called GoFundMe to defray costs and assist with efforts to produce recordings of some of Philip's work so more people will have a chance to hear and appreciate his unique compositions.

Many of Philip's friends have written moving tributes on the site to the man who changed either their playing or their understanding of music forever, or both.

Philip's brother Michael remarks on the site, "When I think of Philip, I find solace in the words of Will Durant; 'In all things I saw the passion of life for growth and greatness, the drama of everlasting creation. I came to think of myself not as dance and chaos of molecules, but as a brief and minute portion of that majestic process.' I can think of no better words to describe Philip's philosophy on life, except to say, 'follow your passion.'"

Philip's family put "Follow your passion" on the urn that holds his ashes as an expression of the life which took Philip all around the world. As he traveled, Philip opened thousands of hearts to not just music, but music's historical context and its necessity as part of what keeps us connected and makes our lives seem fresh and new every moment. Philip knew that music was not expendable, that it was often the key straight to the heart, and he loved to make that connection in a world where stopping for a moment even to enjoy one of the world's most highly acclaimed compositions has somehow become a difficult thing to do.

That we are all brothers was a given to Philip, who couldn't understand how Berkeley 's priorities had become so confused that it was systematically pricing and pushing out the working-class artists who were his friends and neighbors, and the people who managed against all odds to share what little they had on the streets.

"He was a musical angel," reflects Suzanne Sastre, one of his oldest friends. "He was not pretentious, though he could have been. His head was in the clouds or somewhere magical. He loved to have fun, he loved to chat, and he was very kind."

The man who would have given anyone the shirt off his back left very little behind him except that same starry look in the faces of those who knew him, heard him, and loved him. His guitar will go to one of the musicians who played his compositions, and his music will be treasured as long as we can hold on to what is so precious in this world: the music that celebrates with such perfection what is most beautiful about us as human beings, creatures of unparalleled imagination and joy, honored and loved by a caring community.

# The Moral Beauty of Acts of Goodness and Justice

**Wherever and in whomever we find love, courage, sacrifice, generosity of spirit, resistance to power and injustice, the telling of truth and a faith kept with others — ah, it is there that beauty appears, shining forth.**

Nelson Mandela, July 18, 1918 — Dec. 5, 2013. Photo: South Africa The Good News

**I think of men I met in hobo jungles quite willing to share their shelter and food and who cared for each other in a way that those with homes often do not; of Rosa Parks and the freedom riders and countless heroes who resisted power at great personal cost.**

## A New Year's Reflection

**by Peter Marin**

A few weeks ago, after Nelson Mandela's death, I sent this to a friend:

### MANDELA

**A few**
**are chosen, the few**
**who remember their names, who have**
**faces in the mirror, for whom**
**time stops, allowing them**
**to breathe. We need**
**no words. Nothing suffices.**
**Let the waves break**
**silently on the shore**
**of each solitude, each life**
**wasted or thrown away.**
**His heart did not break.**
**His will was not broken.**
**This shames us. We**
**must change our lives.**

My friend wrote back asking whether I was aware that my words echoed those of Rainer Maria Rilke in the closing lines of his poem, "Archaic Torso of Apollo," describing the torso's beauty: "there is no place/that does not see you. You must change your life." (MacIntyre translation)

I said yes, I'd done that on purpose, and perhaps the reasons I gave him will suffice for this New Year's message.

I think Rilke may have been mistaken in one important way: it is not aesthetic beauty (as powerful as it can be) that calls us most strongly to account or changes how we see ourselves. It is, instead, what I will call here "moral beauty" — that is, human acts of courage, generosity, love, solidarity, sacrifice or rebellion and resistance, which by their nature remind us of what is humanly possible and require us to re-examine our lives.

Years go, I worked on a piece for *Harper's* about the Getty museum, where concerns like these naturally arise, since many of its valuable holdings had been acquired by Getty from the Gestapo after they had confiscated the possessions of Jews (although this was not mentioned anywhere in the museum).

Moreover, in the "information rooms" of the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not a word about the French revolution, just as elsewhere in the museum, in a description of a famous photograph by Steiglitz of arriving immigrants, steerage was described as "the economy class of its time."

In other words, the Getty, like many other museums, routinely treated the question of morality, history and aesthetics as if these were basically separate realms, just as many of us were taught to separate them in the better class-encapsulating colleges we went to; that is, we were encouraged, via an almost magical and silent transmission, to understand our good fortune, privilege and superiority in terms of both knowledge and taste.

To put it simply, we now knew, as others did not, what it was important to know, and we also knew that, knowing such things, we were superior to those who did not know them — the lesser many who, to use Obama's unfortunate but revealing words about rural Pennsylvanians, had only "god and guns."

In short, "culture" (and therefore beauty) came to exist for many of us as a matter of education and taste, as opposed to the deep senses of responsibility, mutuality, connectedness, generosity, solidarity and a shared destiny that necessarily lie close to the heart of any morality or culture and which relate people one to another (sometimes, it is true, in dangerous ways), requiring from them something beyond self-concern, and thereby forming a ground of both individual conscience and "the common good."

The fact is that when I examine my own experience, I find that I have probably been more deeply moved or changed by certain human acts of courage, goodness, sacrifice and devotion than by literature; and when I have been most moved by literature it has most often, though not always, been by the words and works of those who in some way took the Good (or justice) as their ultimate subject: Tolstoy, for example, or Victor Hugo, or George Eliot, or Shakespeare in *King Lear* or *The Tempest,* or (to list them as they come rapidly to mind) Dante, Blake, Wordsworth, Dickens, Twain, Whitman, Melville, Cather, Camus, St. Exupery in *Wind, Sand and Stars,* Giono in *The Joy of Man's Desiring*, or even DH Lawrence (who once said justice was the deepest sensuality of all).

Most of these writers in one way or another paid homage not only to the Good itself, but also to the power of ordinary people to bring it into existence.

In this sense alone, moral beauty, is, I think, more democratic and egalitarian than aesthetic beauty, for it has little to do with levels of education, taste, wealth or even gifts of talent, and it is quite commonly found in unexpected and marginal places and among "ordinary" or "disadvantaged" people, as those lucky enough, in our own time, to serve in the Peace Corps or to participate in the civil rights movement often discovered.

I think as I write (again, in terms of my own experience and in no particular order) of peasants in Peru risking everything for a small patch of land and stubbornly waiting, unarmed, for armed thugs to arrive; or of an impoverished woman in Ecuador who turned down $40 from the governor of the state after her son was killed by soldiers, and who told me, "I did not raise my son to be bought and sold like a pig."

I think, too, of black men and women I saw weeping and singing in Alabama as for the first time in their history they elected black officials to a school board; of men I met in hobo jungles quite willing to share with one another and with me their shelter and last bits of food and who cared for each other in a way that those with homes often do not; of Rosa Parks and the freedom riders and countless anonymous local heroes who were never publicly seen or named, but who resisted power and authority at great risk and cost to themselves; of a Jehovah's Witness I knew in Colombia who went door to door in the countryside, one step ahead of the army, telling the peasants that God had given the earth to them and not to their rulers or rich land-owners.

And I am thinking, too, of a Mexican peasant who literally crawled out of a thatch-roofed hole in the ground to offer, unasked, a plate of beans and rice when a friend and I were stuck for a couple of days trying to hitch-hike along a dirt track in Baja California; of black children, inspired more by the Bible than any of the secular texts most of us prize, who walked into white schools while people screamed at them on all sides; of the firemen on 9/11 entering the burning tower from which they knew they might never emerge; and yes, even of certain Vietnam vets I knew and grew to love who fought in a war I hated, and who did, by their own account, terrible things, but who also, in many instances, learned more (and in turn taught me more) about courage, love of comrades, sacrifice, and especially our universal, yes, universal, human capacity for error and evil than I for one managed to learn in school or from books.

And there are those too — I do not want to scant the intellect — who routinely risk their livelihoods and reputations to put forth unpopular ideas or question received wisdom or tell truths others do not want to hear, and such men and women exist, thank heavens, at every level and in all corners of society, though most persistently, perhaps, on its margins.

What I want to do here, then, is simply to point out that many otherwise "ordinary" people manage, perhaps in lesser ways than did Mandela, but not unlike him, to bring the Good into the world through their courage and their devotion to it — "the word made flesh," as Christians like to say. It is these people, I think, who remind us, or at least remind me, of the forms the Good can take and where, in fact, it comes from.

Don't get me wrong. I love many museums; and certain writers have been for me like fathers or brothers pointing a way through the world; I know that Bach, for instance, like Rilke, can take us, especially in the unaccompanied violin sonatas, out past Plato's Forms and Kant's antinomies into the upper reaches and outer limits of contemplative silence; and so I do not want here to demean in any way art and its beauty or the theater or jazz or poetry or Sinatra's crooning or Mississippi John Hurt's blues and their power to celebrate the transcendent as well as the fully human. Far from it.

I am only suggesting that human acts of goodness or justice do much the same thing and — at least for some of us — do perhaps even more, because in the end I believe Plato was right and that it is the Good (when it is actually done rather than merely described) that crowns and illumines all other values, no matter how often we ignore or forget it.

I think that a recognition of moral beauty and of the capacity of others to bring meaning into existence leads in the end to a necessary kind of both humility and wisdom, for it reminds us that all of us, and I do mean ALL (regardless of class or taste or education or beliefs), can become makers of value, vehicles for and creators of whatever brightens and changes or preserves the world. And it is precisely here, for me, that the word "equality" reveals the deepest of its meanings, because wherever and in whomever we find love, courage, sacrifice, generosity of spirit, resistance to power and injustice, the telling of truth and a faith kept with others — ah, it is there that beauty appears, shining forth.

Morality, said Kropotkin, if I remember right, is "the overflow of vitality." Said Lawrence, "not I, but the wind that blows through me." And Dylan Thomas: "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower."

Life itself, then, really.

Or, if you will, the originary powers of creation (spelled with a large or small C, depending), still at work, even now.

*****

Now, to shift gears: may you and yours have a good and satisfying new year and may it bring you joy and pleasure or whatever else you need for your journey through life. And for those of you who are my contemporaries, aging perhaps faster than we'd like, well, may you be kept safe from the various crises and trials of age and the power of death to take those we love.

Lastly, I hope that all of us in the coming year can learn in this strange and contentious nation, (a) how to use our freedoms wisely, (b) how to protect or extend those freedoms for ourselves and others, and (c) (perhaps most difficult of all) how to live, on all sides, with those who use their freedoms in ways we dislike or abhor.

Take care (which perhaps says it all).

### FLAGS

**by Claire J. Baker**

**While flags flew**
**at half mast**
**for Nelson Mandela,**

**five Bay Area**
**homeless died**
**tragically,**
**nearly**
**unnoticed.**

# How We Found a Safe Haven at the Albany Bulb

*from page 1*

their religion.

I'm pretty sure that if "Hermit" were designated as a protected class of people, there would be legal precedent for saying the State cannot force us to change our beliefs and way of living.

Even then, could two people who live a life where, for the most part, they avoid contact with the rest of the world — except each other — be considered "a hermit"? (Long ago, our friend Sarah declared us "Phlamber," rather than Phyl and Amber. Could we be "Phlamber the Hermit"?)

One dictionary defines a hermit as "a person who has withdrawn to a solitary place for a life of religious seclusion." I would absolutely say that we have both benefited spiritually, as well as mentally and physically, from our secluded, nature-loving way of living.

My entire life, I have been plagued by health challenges, both mentally and physically. I have coped with severe ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) for my whole life. I suffered from severe depression when I was younger and my natural disposition has always leaned towards what many would call "neurotic." And physically, I have suffered a pituitary tumor, lymphedema in my hands, chronic fatigue, myoclonic seizures, bad stomach, back, knees, and the list goes on.

However, my health, although still far from optimal, has improved since I started living on the Albany Bulb.

In a letter addressed "To Whom it May Concern," my psychiatrist declares that I have "intact judgment. Specifically, Amber has chosen a marginalized lifestyle. As she would describe it, she lives 'off the grid' and although most of society would classify her as homeless, she feels very much at home in her living situation. She has lived in the home that she has created with her boyfriend for over 6 years. And regardless of the legal status of the situation, I believe that it is the main reason that she continues to have improving mental health. Her decision to protect her housing situation is internally consistent and reasonable within her life framework."

### Light at end of the tunnel

Living at the Albany Bulb is directly responsible for my generally healthier state of body and mind. However, the thought of being forced to leave our quiet home on the Bulb, and all we have poured our blood, sweat, tears and hearts into for the past seven years, only to go back to living on the streets, is terrifying.

Or, worse yet, to have to leave behind the peaceful existence that seemed like a beautiful light at the end of the dark tunnel of life on the streets, only to live hand-to-mouth "indoors," with all of our money going towards rent...

And, what about our cat? Who are we, to take our cat away from the only home that she has known for most of her life? The home that *she* adopted *us* in!

I am proud to say that I am very active in my civic participation in Albany. When Albany created the Homeless Task Force (HTF), I applied for one of the two positions of "Member Representing the Albany Homeless Community," and was accepted.

While on the HTF, I met some of the most amazing, passionate and righteous fellow Albany residents. Together, we worked hard to try to come up with suggestions for how Albany might "solve homelessness" using the Housing First model, as we were instructed to do by the Albany City Council. (Housing First is based on the approach of giving a homeless individual housing first. Studies and experience have shown that if you give someone somewhere to call home, many people can stabilize their lives and will pull themselves up out of whatever else is holding them down).

**Amber's partner Phyl built this solar array out of pieces of planks from old boats. The solar panels enable them to charge their batteries and phone. Why is the Sierra Club trying to evict people who walk gently on the earth?** Lydia Gans photo

**Living at the Albany Bulb is directly responsible for my healthier state of body and mind. The thought of being forced to leave our quiet home on the Bulb, and all we have poured our blood, sweat, tears and hearts into for the past seven years, only to go back to living on the streets, is terrifying.**

However, the City Council has chosen the "eviction first" approach, against the advice of service providers from all around the East Bay and contrary to all current and conventional knowledge.

### Environmentalists for Eviction

On May 6, 2013, when the Homeless Task Force delivered one of our interim reports on homelessness in Albany to the City Council, a throng of lobbyists from Citizens for East Shore Parks (CESP) and the Sierra Club stood up and spoke during the public comment period. In blatant violation of the Brown Act, the recreationalists used the public comment period for that agenda item to push through their own agenda to evict the residents of the Bulb in order to make a better park "for everyone," as they put it.

These once-respectable environmental activists have continued to show their passion for "parks over poor people" time and time again since that meeting. And they refuse to acknowledge that their actions of pushing for the eviction of otherwise homeless people from their homes go against the Sierra Club's own Environmental Justice Policy.

The Sierra Club and CESP even use the word "campers" to describe the residents of the Bulb, so as to make it sound as if they are advocating for the ousting of law-breaking, unpermitted recreationalists, as opposed to otherwise homeless individuals, who have lived in our homes here for years.

I believe that Albany officials should not be able to give people the gifts of hope, happiness, vitality and health, only to take it away at the whim of lobbyists (i.e., the Sierra Club and CESP), most of whom do not live in Albany, and *all* of whom have somewhere to live other than the landfill.

**Supporters of the Albany encampment gather at the cove.** Lydia Gans photo

For at least the last 20 years, Albany officials have denied that they even had any homeless people living in their town.

City officials even spent $10,000 to $15,000 of their 2012 Community Development Block Grant funds (a HUD grant allocated to help low-income communities) on a project that was located in a neighborhood with an average income far higher than the maximum allowable income of a neighborhood in which they are allowed to spend those funds.

And then, two months later, they voted unanimously to kick us out of our homes. But they have dragged their feet about any money that they might have to spend on our eviction.

Now, in 2013, the Albany City Council has (again) hired Operation Dignity to run two temporary trailers set up in the parking lot of the Albany Landfill, and they have been having their police resume enforcement of the "no camping" ordinance that they passed in 1999, specifically for the purpose of removing inhabitants of the Bulb from our longtime homes.

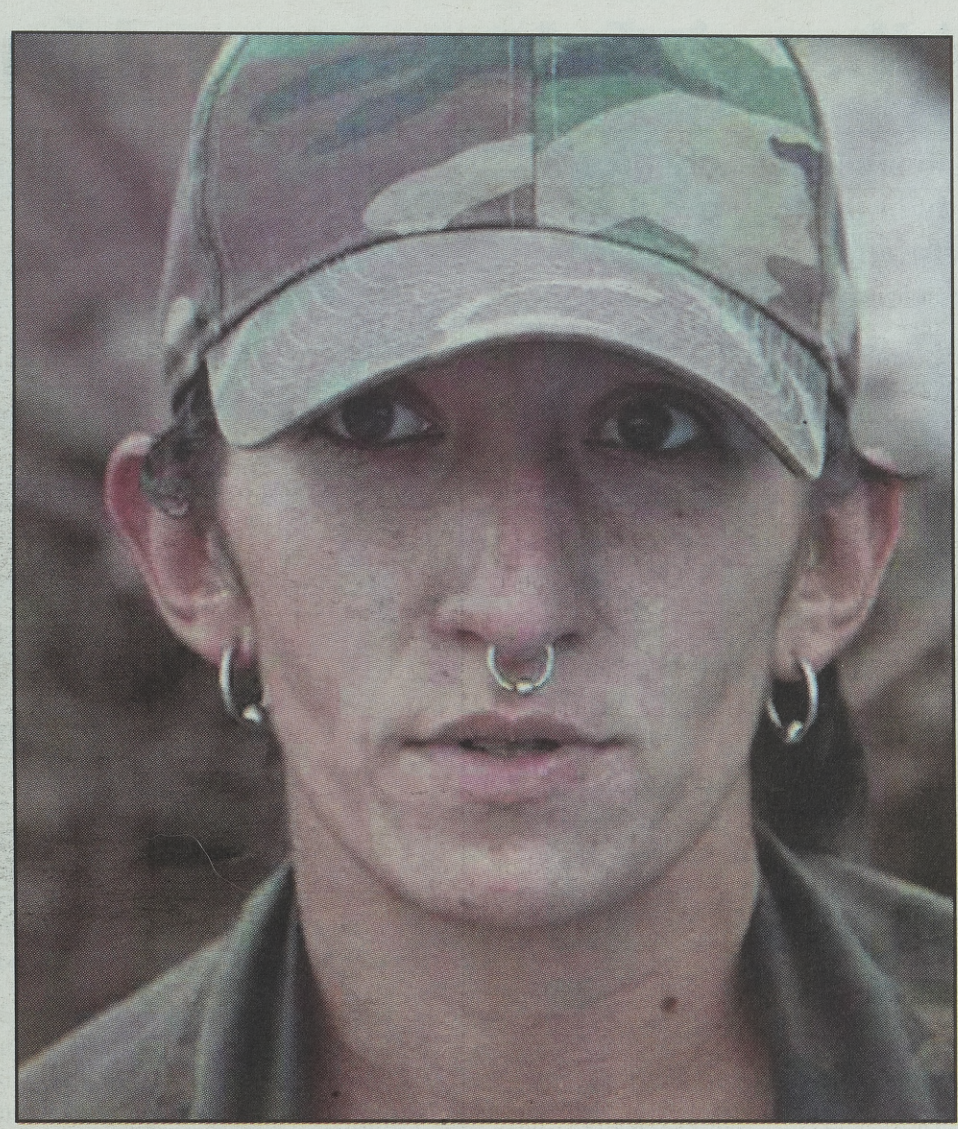
They have never treated the residents of Albany that live on the Bulb like human beings. We have repeatedly implored the City Council to participate in a dialogue, but they continue to turn a deaf ear to our pleas.

Instead, Albany officials have hired agencies to work on their behalf to assist them in our removal — as if we were rats or roaches, as opposed to human beings.

They have already torn down and thrown away three people's camps. Only one of those three camps was abandoned at the time it was demolished. City officials posted notice at only one of the inhabited camps, but the inhabitant was away during that week, and came home to discover that his house and all his possessions were gone. Albany officials did nothing to store any of the belongings of the people whose homes they destroyed.

*See* **Safe Haven in Albany** *page 7*

This towering sculpture on the Albany shore was designed by Osha Neumann. It seems to appeal for justice for the homeless residents. Lydia Gans photo



Amber Whitson's health has greatly improved as a direct result of the peaceful, nature-loving life she has found on the Albany Bulb. Hetta Malone photo

**Once-respectable environmental activists have shown their preference for "parks over poor people" time and time again. They refuse to acknowledge that pushing for the eviction of homeless people goes against their own environmental justice policy.**

# A Safe Haven in Albany

*from page 6*

They just scooped them up and threw them in the dumpsters.

So far, they have housed four people, two of whom are already back living on the Bulb. In May, we had 50 residents; then, at one point, we had 70. Where does the city expect us all to go from here?

The subsidized housing plan they are currently offering to residents who have a high enough income, includes subsidies for only three months. When the subsidies expire, how will all the extremely-low-income people currently dwelling on the Albany Bulb keep their apartments? Two or three months is just long enough to get us out and put up a fence barring entrance to the Bulb, before we get evicted from our apartments for being too poor.

Any realistic housing plan would resemble the federal Section 8 program, where we would pay one-third of our income, regardless of the size of that income, and the subsidy would last forever. That is the only way to actually support all of us moving into housing.

Because of the City Council's refusal to dialogue with us, we have had no resort except suing them in federal court. Albany shows no intention of trying to compassionately end homelessness, and is instead fighting the lawsuit tooth and nail, defending all of their callous actions.

At one point, Albany officials even went so far as to tell the judge that, despite the fact that other programs sponsored by the city of Albany are required to comply with ADA regulations, any program for Bulb residents does not need to comply — despite the fact that virtually all of the inhabitants of the Albany Bulb are disabled individuals.

As evidence of this, the small, temporary trailers that the City wants us to crowd ourselves into, have ramps leading up to the doors of the sleeping quarters; yet, no ramps were installed to allow individuals with mobility challenges to use either the bathrooms or the showers.

The trailers are merely a dog-and-pony show, designed to make it appear as if we are turning our noses up at the things that they are supposedly offering us.

In fact, it gets even worse.

### No room for service dogs

The Albany Temporary Shelter has a total of four small "pens" behind the trailers and next to the generator, for "shelter participants" to keep their dogs in, in spite of the freezing temperatures that the Bay Area has been experiencing.

When shelter staff were asked if they were going to comply with the Fair Housing Act by allowing people to have their emotional support animals with them inside their living quarters, or if they would at least allow the two registered service dogs to stay with their people, the response was a flat-out "No."

In October, one of the puppies who lived here was shot by a police officer in broad daylight, immediately outside of a tent that was packed with people. When they came outside to see what the source of the five rapid-fire shots was, they were told by the lone, uniformed officer that the puppy had "lunged" at him.

Minutes later, when a detective showed up on the scene, shotgun in hand, he took the officer — who also still had his gun drawn, long after the puppy was dead — to the side. Before they left, they were already trying to convince the shocked Bulb residents that they had seen something other than what they saw. And, by the time that the media was asking questions of the city, the official police report said that the puppy had bitten the detective — who wasn't even there when the puppy was still alive.

### A complete lack of services

I have repeatedly been accused by city officials and their cohorts of having "refused housing" offered to me by the City. That is an outright lie.

The City of Albany did *nothing* to get me the Shelter Plus Care housing voucher that I received in 2011. I received that voucher due to the advocacy of the Homeless Action Center, a disability advocacy group in Berkeley.

Unfortunately, after months of apartment hunting, I found out that I was not able to live in Albany while in the Shelter Plus Care program. Albany has absolutely *no* services that could be considered the "care" part of Shelter Plus Care. HUD regulations allow distributors of the vouchers (in my case, the Berkeley Housing Authority) to forbid use of the shelter vouchers in towns without "care."

So my voucher expired, unused. It could not be used solely because the City of Albany has refused to develop any homeless services in the past 30 years, while virtually every other city in the Bay Area has developed a network of homeless services, housing and shelters.

### Share the Bulb

Share the Bulb is an organization of Bulb residents and their supporters, as well as people who recognize the unique nature of this "last liberated zone." An amazing amount of support has come from Share the Bulb activists.

When Albany officials came out to throw away one resident's belongings, the number of people who showed up at the drop of a hat to support our community and protect this space was incredible!

Artists are part of the support network who help to keep this space alive and flourishing. Please come out to the Bulb and make amazing art, while you still can!

### 'Wild Art' at the Bulb

There is a long history of "wild art" at the Bulb: the Sniff murals, the Fairy Castle, Osha Neumann's human sculptures, the Library created by Jimbow.

The City of Albany and the State Parks have plans to choke the life out of this beautiful tradition of self-expression, by allowing only art which has been formally permitted, and forbidding non-regulated art. This would be a crime against true artistic freedom!

The Albany Bulb has always been the last place that is outside of the permit process, outside the ordinances. It's like the last pinhead of land that is truly free and that remains natural and uncorrupted, safe from gentrification.

Together, we can call upon the City of Albany, the Sierra Club, Citizens for East Shore Parks, and the East Bay Regional Parks District to keep the Bulb wild. Together, we can address the problems faced by a growing number of Americans who are experiencing poverty, and treat one another with respect and compassion, rather than with ignorance and a careless disregard for fellow human beings.

All I want to do is go back to the peaceful existence that my partner and I enjoyed, living in harmony with nature, before all this fear of homelessness came about. I can't help but be emotionally overwhelmed at the very thought of being forced to live on the streets again, as I did for eight years before we moved here.

We have now had our home on the Albany Bulb for seven years and counting. This is my home address with the Registrar of Voters for Alameda County.

For years, we were assured by Albany police that we "can stay here, as long as (we) want." Well, let this be one of the few times in my life that I actually accept something offered to me by a cop.

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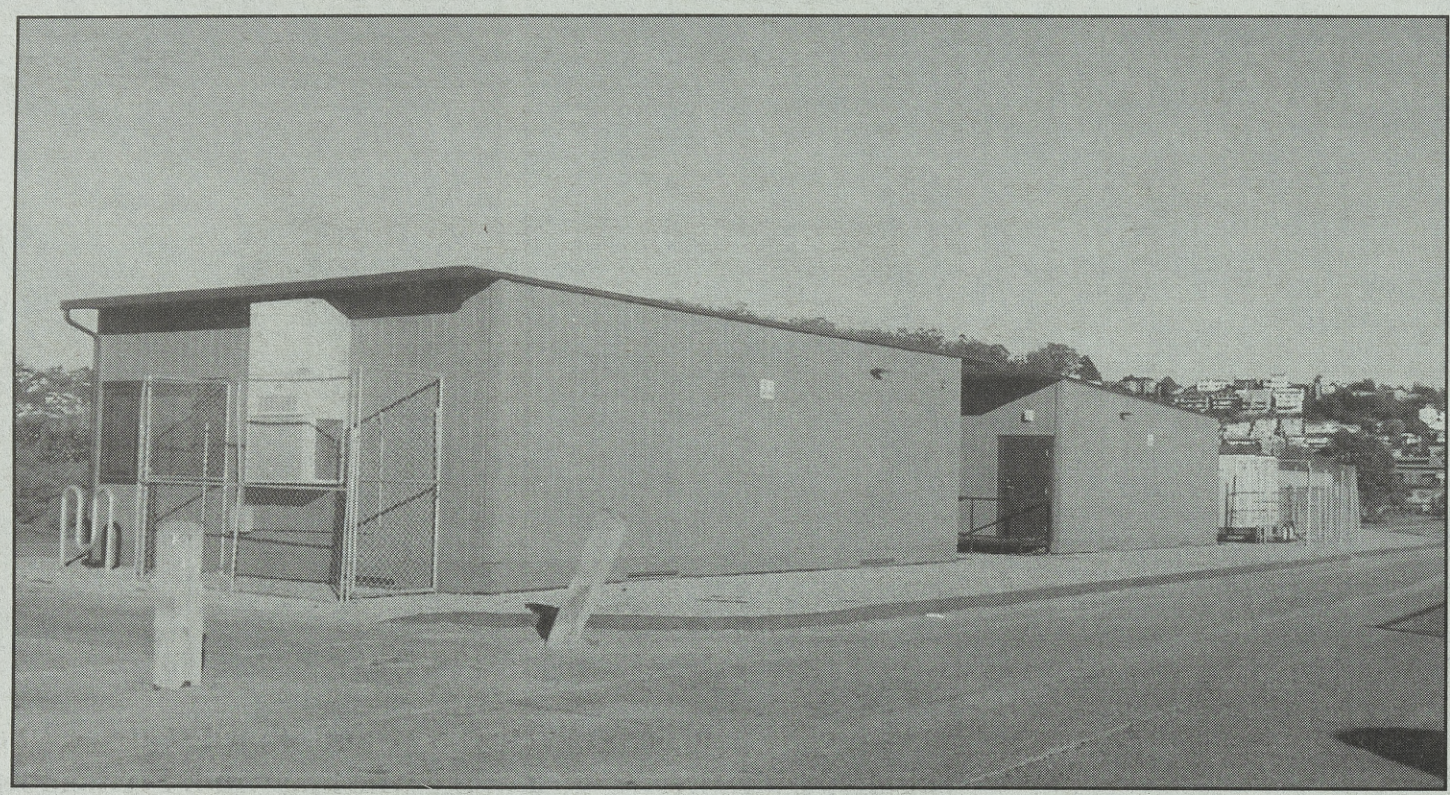
Please join our growing community by visiting www.sharethebulb.org Watch our film on the website, and email us at sharethebulb@gmail.com, so you can stay in the loop about events here at the Bulb.

Or, better yet, come visit the Albany Bulb. It's located at 1 Buchanan Street Extension in Albany, California. Come see for yourself exactly what hundreds of park visitors (from preschool classes to college classes, and from day hikers to dog walkers) enjoy about this place, every day, year round.

# Albany's Inhumane and Irresponsible Eviction Plans

**Albany is virtually the only city in the Bay Area that has refused to develop homeless services for the past 30 years, even while homelessness has increased every year.**

by Lydia Gans



**The shelters set up at the entrance to the Bulb have remained virtually empty, shunned by homeless people. Far from offering a true home, the trailers are cramped, claustrophobic boxes, bleak and virtually windowless.** Lydia Gans photo

The Albany Bulb, a former landfill and dumping ground located at the end of Buchanan Street beyond the Golden Gate Fields Racetrack, has become a flashpoint of controversy, pitting the needs of homeless people against Albany officials and environmental groups lobbying for "parks over poor people."

When the Albany City Council voted last summer, at the urging of the Sierra Club and Citizens for East Shore Parks, to turn the Bulb over to the East Bay Regional Parks District, loud protests were heard.

For the past 14 years, homeless people have been camping on the Albany Landfill, taking care of the land, cleaning up construction debris, planting trees, creating works of art, and making it their home. The takeover by the Parks District means that the 55 or so current homeless people living on the Albany Bulb will have to be evicted. But there is nowhere for them to go. Albany has no homeless shelter, no affordable housing, and virtually no homeless services of any kind.

In October 2013, the City of Albany contracted with the Berkeley Food And Housing Project to help the campers find housing. To date, only three people have been housed, and several homeless people have charged that they are subjected to bureaucratic obstacles and run-arounds when they seek help.

Realizing that there was no way the encampment would be cleared out by the end of the year, Albany officials then contracted with Operation Dignity for $330,000 to operate a homeless shelter for the evicted campers for six months.

A coalition of housing advocates, homeless people and lawyers have questioned why the Albany City Council decided that in six months they need no longer concern themselves with the welfare of the campers they have voted to make homeless. The coalition also questioned why the council did not use the $390,000 toward the creation of affordable housing in Albany.

The shelter is a farce. It consists of two trailers set up along the road at the entrance to the parking lot. They are cramped, box-like affairs about 20 feet by 40 feet, one furnished with bunk beds for 22 men and the other with dining facilities and bunk beds for 8 women. There is room for people to bring with them only a small bag of personal possessions.

Outside, along the road, there are four toilets, two each for men and women, shower structures behind them, and four cages to serve as kennels for the dogs. Behind the dog cages, an enclosure houses the generator and a minimal storage area.

It has been pointed out that many of the campers threatened with eviction have dogs that serve as emotional support companions, including two service dogs trained to assist disabled persons. Yet, they are forbidden to allow their dogs to accompany them into their living quarters.

Furthermore, in violation of federal law, the toilets and showers are not accessible for people with disabilities.

The trailers are open from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. Homeless campers signing in before 6:30 have priority; after that, the notice says, "available beds will be provided to others who are homeless in Albany."

It is worth noting that this is the first time that the City of Albany has ever provided any shelters for its homeless people, and is now doing so only to justify the mass eviction of people from the Albany Bulb. Housing advocates point out that when the portable trailers are shut down after the six-month period, Albany will again have no homeless programs whatever.

The Albany City Council has been subjected to a great deal of criticism for defaulting on its responsibility to develop affordable housing for low-income citizens. Albany is virtually the only city in the Bay Area that has utterly refused to develop homeless services for the past three decades, even while homelessness has increased every year.

Before people can even gain entrance to the portable shelter, there is a process for them to prove that they have been living at the Albany Bulb which involves either verification by Berkeley Food and Housing Project or actually showing their campsite to a city official. In addition, there are a number of rules regarding dress and behavior and a warning posted: "No visitors allowed on the premises," leading one camper to observe that, "even in jail, people can have visitors."

Not surprisingly, very few people have chosen to stay at the shelter; indeed, on many nights it remains unoccupied. A report on November 17 in the Albany Patch online news site cited a report by Albany public information officer Nicole Almaguer that "the number of people staying in the shelter continues the recent trend of 1 to 3 per night."

It can hardly be expected that people would suddenly abandon the homes they have been living in for years — homes they built with incredible resourcefulness out of rocks, metal scraps, odds and ends of fabrics, found and recycled materials. They have created homes that protect them from the elements in the winter and summer, provide privacy and comfort, and allow them control over their lives.

It is unreasonable, if not inhumane, to now force them to be confined in what amounts to a box for eight hours a night, crowded next to other people only a few feet away. And for the many campers whose dogs are an important part of their lives, being separated from their canine companions would be unbearable.

Asa is 38 and has been living at the Bulb on and off for years. He can't stay in the shelter. He explains, "I just got labeled schizophrenic, so I can't go there. It's clearly not a good place to go." Speaking not only for himself, but for many others living on the landfill, he says, "Also it's not healthy."

Asa talks about his passion for creating art. He recalls coming to the Bulb 20 years ago. A number of artists were there at the time and he joined in with enthusiasm. "I met Osha (Neumann) and he'd keep me here for five hours doing art," Asa says.

He returned to the landfill three years ago after many years away and took up his paints. "I covered up all my old work and made it all new just recently," Asa says, "when they told us we have to leave. I had to do something so I did some more art work. This is the only place I can get away with spray painting all day long."

Mom-A-Bear, a longtime Bulb camper, replies with an emphatic, "No," when asked if she will go into the portable shelter. "That's like a jail," she says. "If I want to go to jail, I'll just go and break the law. I think it's just as well that they're bringing in people from other places that can stay there. If somebody wants to stay there let them."

Scot is 55 and has been on the Bulb more than three years. "Living large," is how he describes life on the landfill. He is definite about not being willing to go into the shelter. "If this ends," he says of the encampment, "I can go back to People's Park but I don't really want to." He adds, "They can tear down a camp. Did that to a couple of people. If you go into the shelter or they find you a place to live they can move into your camp and just tear it up."

Police harassment of the campers is intensifying. People are being issued warnings or citations for curfew violations. Albany municipal code 8-4.3 bans people from the area between 10:00 p.m. and 5:30 a.m.

Amber Whitson, an organizer and articulate spokesperson for the campers, has received a warning and is hearing from many others being cited or charged. A camper named Glen recently got a citation for curfew violation.

"They came all the way to my camp about a week ago," Glen says. "They gave me and two other people citations at 12:30 at night. Woke me up — we were lying down, me and my dog." A warning can lead to a citation and arrest if it is found that the person has a police record.

The City of Albany began the process of turning the Bulb over to the East Bay Regional Park District and making plans for evicting the campers last summer. The campers protested and more and more people who feel that the mass eviction is wrong began to join them. There were marches to City Hall and noisy City Council meetings. Community support grew. A website, sharethebulb.org, was created to tell the story and attract activist supporters to the cause. Bulb residents and supporters held meetings and showings of Andy Kraemer's film, "Where Do You Go When It Rains."

A group of people from the Solano Community Church went out on a Saturday morning and chalked the SHARE THE BULB message on Solano Avenue sidewalks. (It rained buckets an hour after they finished so they went again on the following Saturday.) There have been camp-outs and concerts at the Bulb and shared meals brought by Solano Community Church, Food Not Bombs and other groups.

Attempts to stop the eviction are still in process. A federal lawsuit was filed in November seeking to block the eviction, but U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer refused to grant a temporary restraining order. In December, an amended suit was filed in the U.S. District Court in San Francisco charging that the shelter violates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as constitutional rights including protection against unreasonable search and seizure and the right to privacy. The number of plaintiffs increased from 10 in the original suit to 29. A decision is expected to come in January.

At issue is not only the fact of the inadequacy of the shelter but the absence of any plan for the evictees at the end of six months. If the eviction were to be carried out, some 55 people would be pushed out on Albany streets and become homeless.

Amber Whitson is eloquent in expressing the determination of the Bulb community to resist. "This is our home," she declares. "You can't just drive us out of our home. Surely something will register that what they're doing is too much trouble for them. Because what they're doing is wrong. If it was not wrong, it wouldn't be so much trouble for them.

"What they're doing is wrong. And we'll put every obstacle in their way until they get it right."

Perhaps if the government officials, encouraged by the citizens of Albany, can muster enough good will and good sense, they can make it right. Maybe they will realize that the nearly $400,000 they spent on the shelter could have been better used toward getting the campers into decent, safe, affordable housing. Maybe Albany can be a city that cares about its wildlife and its art and all its people.

# A Missing Mother
## *The Transfer*

**Short Story by George Wynn**

Biff's day was going nicely, a good night's sleep at a small South of Market shelter and even some morning coffee with rolls, jam and butter.

Before he got on the California street bus a few blocks up from the Embarcadero Center, he checked his watch: 12:25. Long-haired, clean-shaven, and carrying a duffel bag, he stood patiently trying to get the attention of the driver who was surrounded by tourists asking for specific directions.

Finally they made their way towards the rear of the bus and he showed his transfer. The driver studied the transfer, glanced at his watch and exclaimed, "Expired."

"What?" yelled Biff.

"Transfer's only good till 12:30."

"I got on before 12:30."

"I got a schedule to keep. Pay your fare or get off my bus!"

Biff let out a heavy sigh, hesitated and turned to get off.

"I'll pay his fare," a voice shot out.

Biff turned his head from the first step, "You don't have to, ma'am."

"Yes I do," said a 70ish Asian woman in jeans and white jacket. She approached the fare box and slid in two dollar bills. "Transfer please," she said, her head held high, gaze steady and focused.

The driver handed her a transfer, frowning, bowing his head as if to evade the intensity of her black eyes.

She handed Biff the transfer, looking at him in a familiar way with her now soft eyes. "Come sit with me."

"Yes, ma'am."

They sat down in a two-seater near the exit. "What's your name?" she asked.

"Biff," he said, extending his hand.

"Yuki," she said with a warm handshake. "People like the bus driver once had control over me," she said. "To be at the mercy of someone's biases and temperament is so darn unpleasant."

Biff listened intently to the serious tone of her voice.

"I guess my legs and memory had a will of their own when I saw the bus driver lose his manners," she explained.

"Sometimes when people see me with this big heavy bag, they profile me as homeless — which, right now, I am."

"It makes me angry to see anyone excluded," she said and then she told him the story of being interned in Topaz, a relocation camp in Utah, far from her home in San Francisco's Japantown.

"I remember staring at barbed wire and armed sentries," she said. "I remember being engulfed by scattering dust in the wild and whirling wind. I remember laying in my bed at Topaz wishing I could raise my voice and say people should not be mean to one another. My mother taught me back then when I was a little girl that no matter how bad the day was, tomorrow would be different and better if we maintained our dignity."

Biff was lost in silence.

"Where are you going?" asked Yuki.

"Out to Ocean Beach. I like to watch the rhythm of the waves coming in and receding. It comforts me and washes away my anxiety. My mother died of ovarian cancer last year."

The memory of blood trailing her as she entered her apartment building by a country-and-western theatre in downtown Wheeling, West Virginia, is beyond grief.

"I'm so sorry for your suffering," said Yuki.

"Thanks," he said, eyes holding back emotion.

"I'm leaving in the morning. Got a job in the Grand Tetons in the kitchen at one of the lodges," Biff said, grabbing the notification letter out of his pants pocket.

"Wonderful," Yuki said, reading the letter carefully. "Can I treat you to lunch?"

"Yes ma'am. I'd like that fine."

At Fillmore Street, Biff started for the front of the bus. Yuki nudged him, pointing to the back exit. "I always follow the rules."

They walked down Sacramento Street, down streets Yuki used to play on until they reached the Peace Pagoda by the Japantown mall. Biff stared at the memorial statue and said, "I wake up to a lot of anxiety. The ghost of my mother appears and I'm low for the day."

"Let's eat," said Yuki.

Over teriyaki salmon, salad, miso soup, avocado sushi and hot tea, Yuki related how in the Japanese language there is no original word that communicates depression. "I had a roomer born in Japan who worked in my garden almost daily till three days before he died at 99," she said.

Biff nodded. "I'll work my way out of the blues."

"Yes, you will," said Yuki. "You are a survivor like me who understands suffering." She paused to wipe her mouth. "Where are you staying tonight?"

"On a friend's floor."

"You need a good night's sleep. All that bus traveling. You're welcome to sleep on my couch. I live alone. Only a few blocks away."

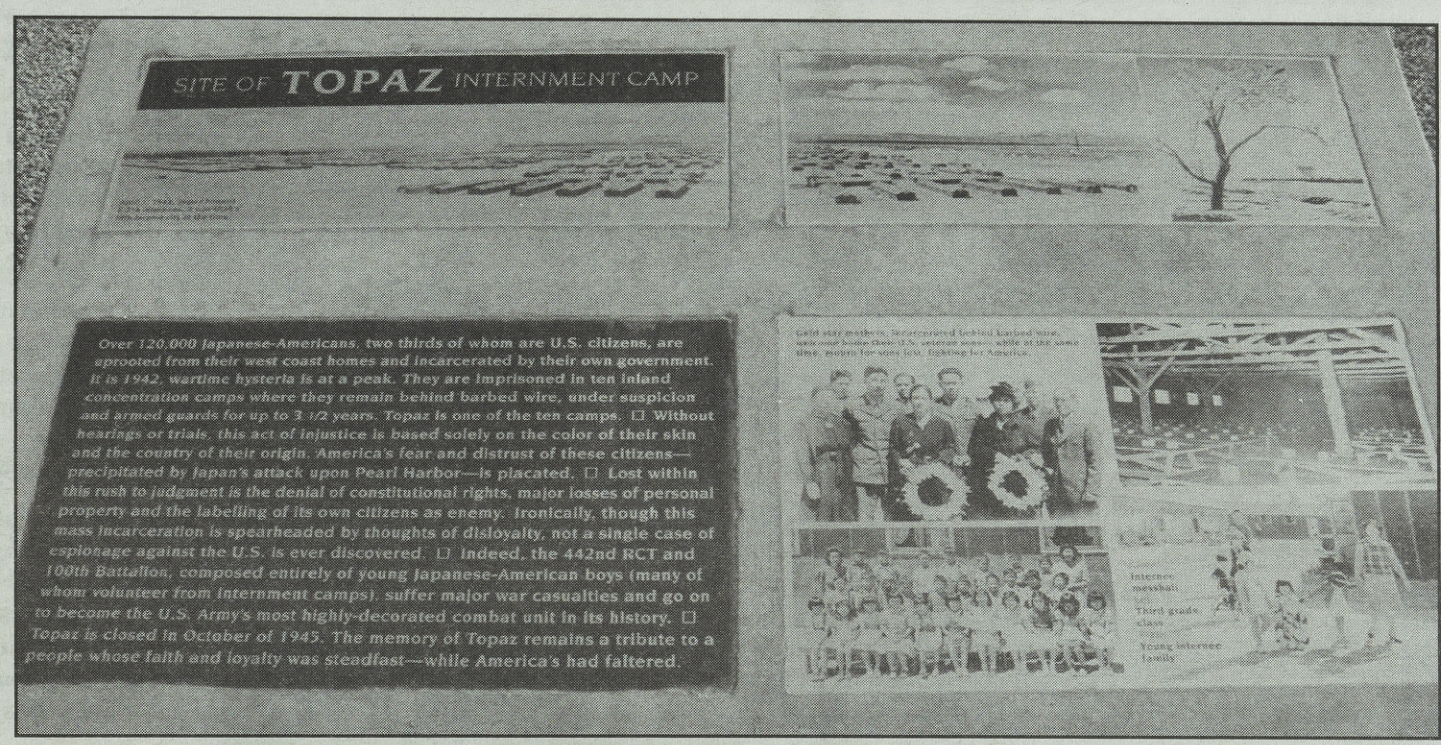
"You're very trusting, but you don't even know me."

"I know you. You're a good young man in touch with your real self and real feelings. Sometimes you get labeled like they did to us Japanese Americans but you search for that path back to the humankind."

"I accept," Biff smiled grateful.

He left quietly in the morning before Yuki woke. On the couch he left a note: "Thank you very much for your kindness."

On top of his note he left a black-and-white photograph of Biff and his mother, smiling in front of the country-and-western theatre when Biff was a teen.




**Memorial at the Topaz internment camp in the Utah desert where thousands of Americans of Japanese descent were confined.**

**"I remember staring at barbed wire and armed sentries," Yuki said. "I remember being engulfed by scattering dust in the whirling wind. I remember laying in my bed at Topaz wishing I could raise my voice and say people should not be mean to one another."**

# The Missing Father
## *A Dream Story*

**I am amazed to see a red brick building on the corner where I thought my father's residence was. Instead, it is now the San Francisco Zen Center. Am I in a dream? Is the spirit of Kafka alive and well?**

**Short Story by George Wynn**

I swear I will not return to the shelter. I leave my bags in my father's small room in a residential hotel on Laguna Street in San Francisco. In the far corner, the slender 60-ish homemaker complains: "Your father is so darnn bossy."

I pat her on the shoulder. "I know," I say, with a medium sigh. My father stares at me even though his hearing has declined, so he could not have heard her concern. He does not say a word but holds me with his stiff lips and focused eyes.

She continues, "If I'm five minutes late, it's a capital crime. Nothing is ever clean enough for him." With a gleam in her eye, she adds, "He raises his voice to me more often than my first love raised my skirt."

Her regression to coquetry takes me aback and not knowing what to make of it, I rush off to a journalism class at the Media Alliance.

In class, I cannot concentrate. Instead, I daydream about the father who I always took for a puritanical type and the recent rumors buzzing around the hotel, especially by the women, that he was quite a ladies man before I was born.

After school, it begins to rain and, for a moment, I regain my focus as I pass the Old Mint on Fifth and Mission Streets. The plague on the building wall says: "Old United States Mint (1874-1937) designated a National Historic Landmark in 1961." I'm a San Francisco history buff.

The rain intensifies, so I enter a bookstore specializing in books written in Tagalog. A big tome of black-and-white photographs enthralls me, especially shots of Filipino merchant seamen in front of the International Hotel and heroes of the cultural left: San Francisco labor leader Harry Bridges and the poet George Hitchcock.

The rain subsides. A few blocks further down Mission Street, I begin to feel disoriented because the streets seem different. This could be Detroit or Chicago. I walk around a few blocks in a fog. I blink my eyes hard as I pass a medical marijuana storefront. Across the street, a spike-haired punkette sitting on a milk crate with a cute smile offers me a thick joint. I take a succession of puffs for over five minutes, relaxing me.

Turning left towards Market, a pack of gangbangers are punching each other hard in the chest. They are about a half block away. Scared, I turn back to Mission until I reach Van Ness and wind up a few blocks from Church and Market. I have a migraine headache and vertigo has set in.

I encounter a wide-bodied black man with big, blue, plastic sunglasses and brown-leather jacket and jeans and his pale-shirted, silent friend. "How far to Haight Street?" I ask.

"Five blocks," he says firmly but cordially.

"Is Laguna Street that way?"

"Yes, I believe so," he says in a reassuring manner.

I walk so fast, I do not remember a single thing I pass and am amazed to see a red brick building on the corner where I thought my father's residence was.

Instead, it is now the San Francisco Zen Center.

Am I in a dream? Did the punkette lace the cannabis? Is the spirit of Kafka alive and well? Am I the protagonist in a short story that I did not write?

I go inside and sit in the courtyard and bow my head for a quarter of an hour, desperately trying to quiet my mind — to no avail. Taking a massive deep breath, I march downstairs to meditate. The cushion under my butt seems to send a vacuum of air up my spine to my brain, cleaning out some of the soot of confusion.

I am the lone person meditating. After an hour, I look up at the ceiling and begin to chant. "Father is here somewhere. Father is here somewhere."

Afterwards, I go upstairs. Dog-tired, I fall asleep in the courtyard. When I awake in the morning, my bags are next to me.

"Homelessness Has Faces" Art by Rodney Bell

## Street Spirit

by Carla Koop

He sits on a crate, six feet away.
Orange stripes beam from his polo shirt.
A small black pack rests at his foot,
zipped up tight. He lifts his shirt to scratch.
Bright white fabric tumbles out like a secret.

I peer at him sideways behind brown shades
my coffee cup a bollard between us.
Sun glares down on his bare face,
which crumples, like the newspapers under his arm.
His close-cropped hair glistens like fertile soil.
His question, always the same, hangs in the air.

Spare change for the homeless?
He mouths his mantra quietly, a prayer
not really meant for passersby.
He fingers his wad of papers like a rosary
while the news of the day marches on.
My sympathy rises and falls
like swells on the ocean.

He stoops to clear trash from the street:
What a worthy, working man!
The guy next to me eyes his phone, ambles
away: If the rich don't give, why should I?
A woman drops a bill and business card in his hand:
So many resources for people like him!
An Asian man, balancing groceries, gives him
chocolate and a smile: He's giving, so should I!

Mostly they bustle by, eager for coffee
or the next errand on this Sunday.
His question lies like a stray rock on the sidewalk.
Rising, I cross the hard white walk
put 50 cents in his palm, take a worn paper
and begin to read the news.

## empty lunch bucket brigade

by Randy Fingland

from out of the would work
the unemployed were born
would do a job, but can't
there are no jobs, no hiring signs
the bottom current of the labor
pool has dried up, is drifting sand
along a canal designed to
pinch out as many as can
from getting even 2 meals a day

## Revised Power Anthem

*(Nonviolent movements for change)*

by Claire J. Baker

All power to the people
but not the negatives in power —
those atop a steeple.
Power to the real people
the ones becoming feeble
from lack of food each hour.
Power, please, to striving people,
skip over the negatives in power.

## The Old Footsteps

by George Wynn

There's a glimpse of
Civic Center sun
but this is the time
of darkness for him

His caterpillar fingers
strum his white guitar
in the San Francisco summer
and yearn for the sight of
down home players
and to hear the
old footsteps of
Hank, Charlie, and Frank
and the tapping of their feet
to the Beale Street Blues

When the weather was good
they'd leave Tennessee
for Washington D.C
and wander to Vancouver B.C
and down the coast
to old Mexico

His guitar case
lies quiet except
the clink clank
of a quarter or two

Now the sun
has gone
and it's time
to move on
down the line.

## The Woods

by Joanna Bragen

so densely packed
pushing through
I am met
with
daggers
branches
unsteady footing
poison leaves
scrapes
cuts
pokes

I don't know if I have ever
been so lost

too dark
to see in front of me
and I definitely don't want
to look back

smothered so strongly
I am starting to feel insanity

I push on all night
knowing that the
wrong path
could be even worse
one foot in front of the other
I try to stay the course

darkness finally leaves
making my trip
a little more clear
and I thank God
my light
is finally feeling near

she calls to me to approach
I stumble one last time
but I've always known
how to pick myself up
and I carry on

I reach her
feeling warmer
in her glow
dependable
my rock
her positivity
takes control

I am finally out of this nightmare
so lost I thought I may never
make it back

but my story has
a happy ending
and I've made it through
yet another attack

## the right to sit stand

by Randy Fingland

explicit
is the crowd
outdoors tonight
because there's no roof
available — even a tent
there's a certain
resemblance to no room
at the inn — but the measure
is there's no stable
no manger
no automatic answer
to why who is here tonight
under the streetlight

or not, no shuteye
in answer to what
the future recalls
of the sleeping under
bridges laws

## American-Style War

by Claire J. Baker

Attack, kill, conquer,
shamble ancient cities,
make a mess of mosques,
schools, hospitals.

Survey buildings bombed,
infrastructure zapped;
miscount/mislead
casualties on either side.

Rebuild, restore, move on
bones of a despot tucked
in dusty rucksacks.

Soon new ranks of homeless:
maimed, stress-disordered,
pill-popping Jack & Jill
Armstrongs, good soldiers
shipped back, not needed!

## quid pro quo for all

by Randy Fingland

must welcome
the select many
who choose to
erect mindsets to keep
the cold & wet away
from enjoyment
of a good night's sleep
on public land
put there
for the public's use

## Last Reverie Along the California Coast

by George Wynn

Rafael is sitting in a small cafe
in Monterey unable to eat
reading *Cannery Row*
and reflecting upon
rolling up his sleeves for
six years on hot tar roofs
being cooped up
in a noisy Tenderloin
hotel room studying *Ingles*
on nights he can't sleep
and hearing the despair
of daily beggars on
morning streets

He stares out the window
right now he's imagining tomorrow:
hills rolling down the
Monterey peninsula
cypress tress and pine trees
the sun caressing each
blade of grass

He lets out a big breath
and thinks to himself
the money was great
but now he feels his fate
is to return to the Yucatan
from where he was called
to support his wife and children and
buy land for his Maya familia

They will be beekeepers
and spoon honey on hot tortillas
and drink tea in la manana

He knows he won't be
back to El Norte
Rafael can't face it anymore
he took his licks
crossing the Tex-Mex
frontera twice
he learned there
is a hell

This instant he's craving
precious moments of privacy
along the California coast
staring at his sore
callused hands fingering
John Steinbeck's words

# THE POVERTY LINE

**The people who had been waiting in the long line so they could continue their meager existences were angry. They surged at the enforcement droids and smashed them to bits.**

**Short Story by Jack Bragen**

There was a long line of people that formed at six in the morning at the door of the Department of Domestic Poverty (Concord, California Branch), because it was Wednesday. People needed their restriction cards refreshed so that they would be allowed to buy food and cigarettes, so that they could pay rental fees on their cubicles, and so that they wouldn't be subject to a fine and imprisonment.

As I waited in line, I remembered how events had unfolded, even though it was illegal for me to think about this. The government had become increasingly controlling, increasingly sinister, and increasingly omnipotent. It had happened in stages, each change being spoon-fed to the public so that it would be harder to point out the gradual erosion of liberty, and object that the government was pulling a fast one.

A man next to me deliberately jostled me with a pretense of it being unintentional. "Sorry," he said. It was a mock apology. He was a towering, stocky man and I didn't want to argue with him.

"Don't worry about it," I replied, not knowing how I could appease the gentleman.

"Pardon me," he said, in that tone of voice that bullying men use — that fake politeness. "Can I go ahead of you? I'm really in dire straits."

I replied, "We are all in dire straits. I can't give up my spot." I sized up the antagonist, looking for vulnerable spots in case it came to a fight. If I gave up my spot to him, what would stop the next person in line from asking the same thing? And the next?

Meanwhile, an enforcement droid, the type on wheels rather than legs, had shown up. It was within range of stunning either me or the man with whom I had been arguing. "You two, present your cards! You first!" The robot pointed a mechanical finger at my opponent.

We were both about to get pain-whipped. It is excruciating pain and no one wants it. Afterward, they refresh your card because you are usually too weak to continue standing in line. There were a few people who routinely misbehaved, preferring the physical agony over having to wait all day to get their card refreshed.

My opponent produced an aluminum baseball bat seemingly out of nowhere, and caught the enforcement droid by surprise. It was quickly reduced to a heap of sparking electronic pieces.

Everyone in line cheered.

More enforcement droids were coming. I counted five of them and they had their weapons readied. But people had taken enough. The people who had been waiting in the long line so that they could continue their meager existences were angry. They surged at the enforcement droids and collectively smashed them to bits.

In the process of this spontaneous rebellion, one person was shot. An ambulance appeared that had been electronically summoned. Emergency medical care had become worse then a joke, and the ambulance was merely a disposal service.

The crowd gathered around the ambulance and overturned it.

I spotted the man who had started it all. He was stooping over the remains of the robot he had destroyed, and was apparently trying to refresh his card using the electronic pieces. I saw him smile and get ready to walk away.

I quickly walked toward him. "I've got to shake your hand," I said. "I'm Al." I reached toward the stranger.

He reached out a hand. "Baker," he said, introducing himself.

"Way to go, Baker," I said.

I swiped my card on the electronic piece that I had seen Baker use, and we both slipped away from the angry crowd which was now breaking windows.I stopped at the food bank and got some food, and went to my cubicle where my wife and daughter waited. I would have a story to tell them.

*"Waiting"* Art by Rodney Bell

# Why Republicans Hate Obamacare

**by Jack Bragen**

Even now that Obamacare is finally going into effect, Republican leaders are still watching and waiting for ways to foil the Affordable Care Act, a significant achievement of the Obama administration.

I believe that the main reason why Republicans hate it so much can be summed up in one word: Malice.

For all its flaws and shortcomings, Obamacare still would allow poor people to get medical care. The Republicans can't stand that idea.

Obamacare could allow disabled people to go back to work. A major barrier to disabled people getting off disability benefits is that the medical benefits under disability are, for most recipients, absolutely necessary. Typical jobs that a disabled person might be able to obtain are not always those with high wages and do not often include medical benefits.

With adequate medical care as a given, and including the fact that under Obamacare there would be no penalty for a pre-existing condition, a huge burden is taken off those disabled people who would like to try to go back to work.

When disabled people start to get too much money, they are drained of this through "share of cost," which is a way of charging for medical benefits. Going completely off disability benefits, rather than working just a little bit, is out of the question for most disabled people who need medical coverage. Obamacare, when it is in effect, could become a great economic equalizer.

My father (never disabled) was forced to keep working well into his 70s by the fact that he needed the medical benefits. He had health problems that forced him to quit work and eventually led to his demise. Had he been able to stop work sooner, he might have lived a lot longer.

Obamacare is also an attempt at a more compassionate system. The Republican Party has proven, time and again, that they are not about compassion — their mission is to fatten the wallets of those who are already wealthy. Anything that merely helps people and which furthermore, costs money, is contrary to the Republican platform.

A final reason why the Republicans hate Obamacare is that they can't stand to see President Obama be successful in his job. This is the same kind of malice that made the Republicans fight so bitterly against the Clinton Administration. This is a petty form of meanness which obstructs human progress.

# Socially Acceptable Discrimination in Employment and Housing

**Persons with disabilities have been criminalized, locked-up, humiliated, overmedicated, shunned and abused.**

**by Jack Bragen**

Our society is unfair and inhumane toward persons with mental disabilities. We are, in fact, a minority group, yet we are denied recognition as such. It remains socially acceptable to pick on us.

We are discriminated against in employment and in housing. We are essentially forced into segregation by means of the outpatient care system. We are forced to live on meager incomes. And we are kept from participating in mainstream society.

Most people take for granted being able to live in a nice home, in a nice neighborhood, with a spouse, children, plenty of food to eat, bills paid, and vacations. This is the "white picket fence" version of the American dream that baby boomers were led to expect.

Despite economic woes in the United States, a lot of people live this way and take for granted that if they need to pay for something, the money is available.

Yet, when you have a disability and can't work a nine-to-five job, lack of income is a big limitation (unless you have a wealthy benefactor). Lack of money limits one's choices, and through the associated hardships, it can cause extreme discomfort.

Adequate, safe, affordable housing is a rare and precious commodity for people with disabilities. On the amount of income that people get on SSI, they need low-income housing coupled with Section 8. Section 8 housing has earned a bad name among property owners, and most will not deal with it. This means that most disabled people cannot live where they choose. The rentals that still accept Section 8 are usually in dangerous, drug-infested neighborhoods, and the units are often substandard.

Many people with mental health disabilities are forced, by circumstances beyond their control, to live in an institution of some kind. This is just fine with many well-to-do people who believe persons with mental illness are no more than a nuisance. However, for someone with a mental disability, just as for any human being, living in an institution is at the bottom of the barrel of human existence.

Persons with mental health problems are subject to the disdain of successful people who do not understand why we can't just "get a job and be normal." We have been systematically deprived of a societal niche. We are ridiculed for being different and for behaviors caused by our condition. We are stigmatized because we do not always behave in a socially acceptable manner.

Persons with psychiatric conditions are subject to cruel treatment in mental hospitals and outside of them, perpetrated by people employed (hypothetically) to help us. The mental health treatment system is about isolating patients from the rest of society so that we don't bother people deemed part of "mainstream" society. The agenda is to keep the population under control, much more than it is about helping us get well and succeed in life.

Persons with mental illness are an excluded group of people. We are made to feel unwelcome in numerous places; some of these might come as a surprise. People in mainstream society often behave toward us as if we didn't have the right to exist. They believe that we are not good enough to be in their presence.

Persons with mental disabilities are misunderstood. We have been criminalized, locked-up, humiliated, overmedicated, shunned and abused. This is because people in mainstream society have the ingrained impulse to bully those individuals who appear defenseless, if doing so can be rationalized.

## Creating Wealth for Only Self

by Judy Joy Jones

Today I awakened
to a brand new world
laid out before me
like a brilliant jewel

it was a world where
no one was hungry
or in pain

all were working
towards their
highest dreams
with no thoughts
of personal gain

wisdom had replaced
man's ignorance greed and fear
as all could clearly see
creating wealth
for only self
brings wars famine
misery and pain

all people were united
for a second in time
to create new worlds
for *all people* to shine

and as personal collections
of vast wealth vanished
so did wars and famine

today I awakened to a new world
laid out before me
like a jewel
where not one person
suffered in poverty

wisdom prevailed
greed was gone
wars ceased

our new world
was created
with one heartbeat

societies of yesterday
where only a few had
and never shared
were remembered
as the saddest moments
of our entire history

Today I awakened
to a bright new world
laid out before me
like a brilliant jewel!

## Genocide of the Poor

by Judy Joy Jones

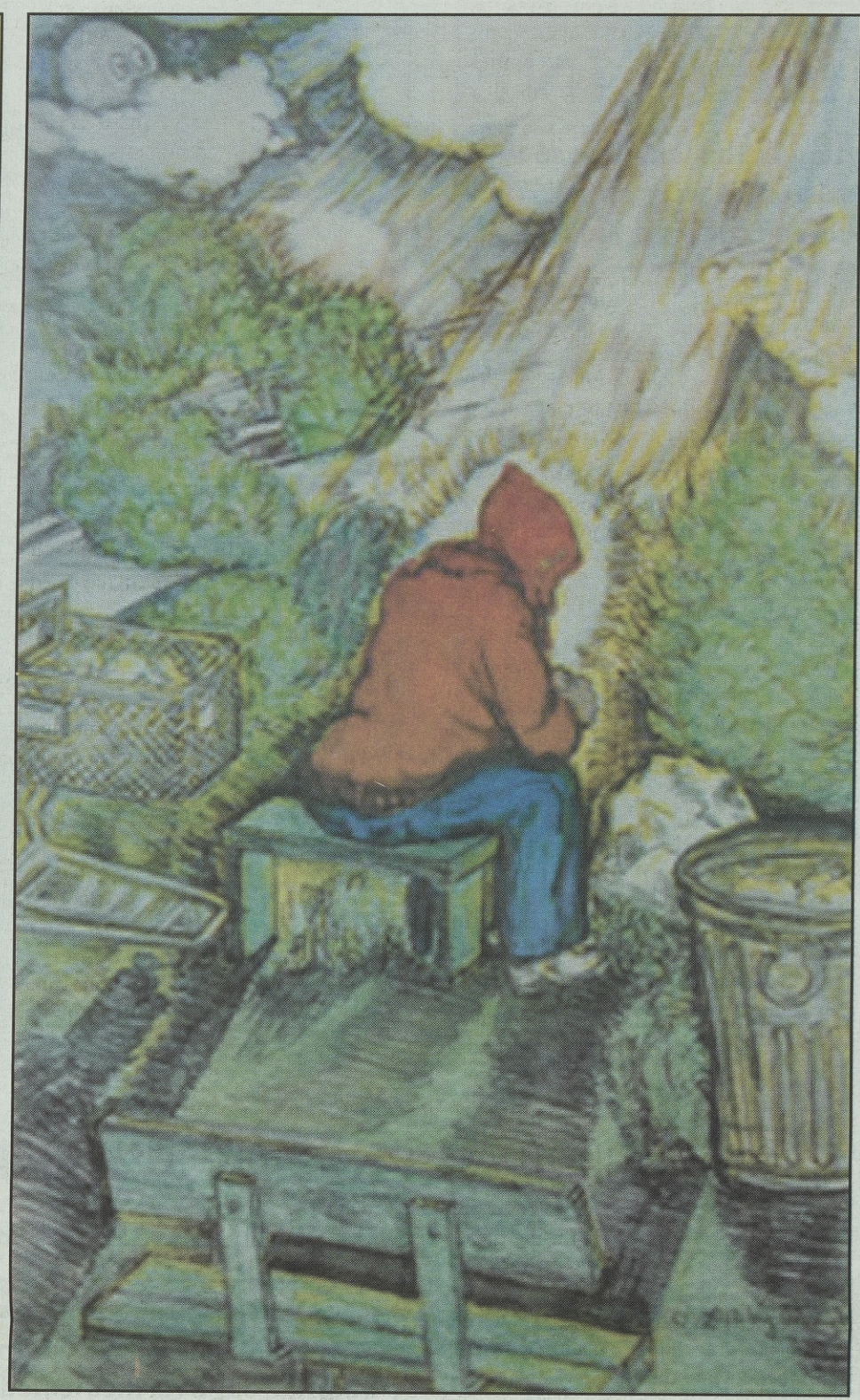
we must never
accept seeing
one homeless man
dying on the street

we must not allow
our minds to tolerate
the hideous holocaust
before our eyes
of the poorest of the poor

no human can survive
forced to live
in filth and shame
as we walk by

we all see
the holocaust
growing larger
each day
and must find ways
to feed house
and clothe
our people
dying on the streets

genocide of the poor
will end
because of you and me
who saw and acted in haste
to help our brothers and sisters
in need



*"Father If It Be Thy Will"* Art by Rodney Bell

## For Meals Only

by George Wynn

I hear the beauty of
homeless men
laughing after a
church meal

They are
so manly
so real

The church people
only sit down
to eat after the
homeless men leave

## The Novelist

by George Wynn

Before they turn out
the shelter lights
pad and pen in hand
he daydreams he's young
and has the literary style
the publishers like
and his novel has
what it takes to
get their attention
and they say
"Sign here
and let's do
a novel every
three years"
and he sits down
every night
and writes,
writes, writes.
It's the most
important
thing in his life.

## A THOUGHT

by Claire J. Baker

Here's to all
epiphanies
personal, universal

that after they
peak and pass
live on as stardust.

## I Asked in Prayer

by Judy Joy Jones

I asked the lord in prayer
why people are
begging for food

I thought god's goodness
was for everyone

and the lord
answered me

the poorest of the poor
count on you and me
to be their voice hands and feet

and when we give until it hurts
the poorest of the poor
will be no more

the day will come
when everyone will have
food shelter and medical care

the lord then opened
heaven's doors
and angels tenderly dried
the tears of the poor
all over earth's shores

and thus the lord
said to me
the homeless will no longer be
when we share
with those in need

## Native Daughter

by George Wynn

How do you define your self-worth
when no one cares about you
in the city of your birth
and labels you homeless whether
you are or are not?

And you want to scream
"Why do you hate me
I am not an expatriate
I am your native daughter
whether I sleep in your world
by the Top of the Mark
or whether I have fallen
onto a lonely and dark
street near ATT Park?"

## Strolling Downtown, Winter Evening

by Claire J. Baker

Stopped at a red light
we heard and saw in shadows
an army vet who made
odd whelps, weird hand signs.

Maybe in his winter plight
he summoned God who
(God, help him)
surely would come that night.

## Minus Decent Housing

by George Wynn

I see new people with
no place to go
stand in line at St. Anthony's
they wear thrift store clothes
A crippled man says, "It's been all
downhill since the Ellis Act
that's a sad fact
seems like the City doesn't care
it's getting worse and worse
each year."

## Poor and Old in the Company of Beautiful Language

by George Wynn

They say the old poet from Baltimore
has no future in the City by the Bay
Forget Cable Car land
they say go back to Maryland

He has no place to live
and is tired of making a plan
for a place for the night
and somewhere cheap to dine
and sore all along the spine
when luck strikes out

By day to get by
he does phone surveys
by night he lives with the company
of boyhood hero Edgar Allan Poe

The gleam in his eye says somehow
things gonna be all right

## The Meadow

by Claire J. Baker

Viewed from afar
the grass appears
to grow evenly.

Closer view reveals
stems with not the same
lean, same green
as they weave
through the meadow.

Slanting unique ways
offshoot pioneers
lend lavender shadows

enhancing depth,
variations on a theme
for the entire meadow.